



## The Art of Planning and Preserving Ancient Cities: The Town of Nedroma as a Case Study.

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Received: XX January 20XX

Accepted: XX January 20XX

*Abstract ;(not more than 10 Lines)*

*Article info*

*The protection of our urban heritage and the preservation of its distinctive architectural pattern has become a priority. This could be done by studying the structural composition of the general planning of the antique city, knowing its outputs in different respects, and putting barriers to the modern urbanization sprawl. Bearing in mind that nations value their present status by relying on the past and having projections in the future, it is necessary to study the most important remains of antique cities and tying historical links between them in a hierarchical and integrated span of time. It is also necessary to search for the most effective and successful ways to protect what remains of their tissues by involving all the stakeholders. Thus, though the city of Nedroma has noticed many historical and scientific studies, it still remains one of those cities which deserves this kind of consideration and whose most important landmarks preservation is still a matter of debate.*

*Received*

*07/10/2022*

*Accepted*

*05./06/2023*

### **Keyword:**

*Antique cities*

*Planning*

*Preservation*

*Nedroma*

## 1. Introduction

Studying social and religious heritage has become one of the hottest debate topics among historians who consider material heritage as having an important role in achieving a set of major goals put forward by different societies. What motivates the investigation in such subject is the great care that has been given to authentic Islamic cities. This care is manifested in several points, including:

-The large number of scientific meetings that focus their interests in the search for the best ways to save and renew consideration for this architectural and urban heritage.

- The important financial funds allocated to save these cities, and we mention here the city of Tlemcen as it had been previously nominated 'the capital of Islamic culture' for the year 2011.

Thus, the questions that will shape this study are as follow:

**a-** Can we take advantage of this material heritage today, in spite of the fact that our conditions have rapidly developed and our social and economic institutions have grown and are more open to the contemporary civilization?

**b-**How can Islamic cities be saved from these sweeping economic waves?

## **2. Definition of concepts**

**a- Cities:** The word ‘Cities’ is the plural form of ‘city’. A city is an urban grouping with a population.

**b- Antique:** from antiquity: very old.<sup>(1)</sup>

Idiomatically: They are the original urban buildings, which have been known to man since ancient times, and played an important role in shaping his history, and contributed a great deal to crystallizing the elements of his ancient civilizational heritage.

## **3. Traditional Functions of the Ancient Cities**

Studying the traditional functions of the ancient cities embody the following areas:

**a- Economic jobs:** They are important centers for a variety of industrial activities, including the leather industry, tanning, vegetable industries, wood industries, mats, reeds, travel...etc.

**b- Social functions:** They are every connection that has socially taken place in human life since the beginning of stability in human history, the most important of which are social solidarity and cooperation.

**c- Religious functions:** Are the basis for the emergence of the city in ancient times and then developed with the emergence of new balances of power, that is, the ancient cities were characterized by a religious character represented in the sanctification of religious beliefs in every historical period. During the Christian period, the world became interested in churches and gave them great priority. In the Islamic period, attention shifted to mosques.

## **4. The concept of the Islamic city**

In this regard, we mention what one of the researchers in archaeology and urbanization said: “...The Islamic city is not only a group of facilities, buildings and roads, nor it is just a gathering of people in one geographical place, but it is a real interaction between man and man, and between man and place, and this interaction does not happen in vacuum, but is governed by intellectual and scientific frameworks that express a historical picture of that society and that place...”<sup>(2)</sup>. Some researchers and engineering specialists and those interested in construction and architecture, especially Muslims, refer to the fact that the word city is used to refer to the place where the judiciary, i.e. justice, takes place. As the syllable 'religion' in the word indicates the meaning of 'justice', especially if we know that in the heart of the Islamic city is the mosque in which religious rites are held and just rulings are fulfilled. In his book “The Conduct of the Kings in Managing the Kingdoms in Perfection and Perfection,” which was written by the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mu'tasim Bi Allah, in which he mentioned eight conditions for the establishment of the Islamic city<sup>(3)</sup> and which are as follow:

**a-**To bring fresh water to city dwellers and make it easily accessible to everyone.

**b-**To estimate its roads and streets so that they are proportional and not narrow.

**c-**To build in its center a mosque for prayer.

**d-**To estimate its markets according to their sufficiency, so that the residents can buy their different requirements.

**e-**To locate each ethnic tribe in a given place and avoid mixing them up in a same location.

**f-** If the caliph wants to inhabit it, he should live in the widest of its edges, and make his fellows surround him from all sides.

**g-** To surround it with a wall for fear that the King will be assassinated by his enemies.

**h-** To welcome in it knowledgeable people and crafts men sufficiently enough so that they do not need to go out to seek other peoples' services.

Public facilities in the Islamic city have different purposes, some of which achieve the purposes of religious life, and others achieve the purposes of the city (roads, mosques, universities, schools, markets, public baths, water sources) and the like <sup>(4)</sup>.

The distribution of these facilities varies according to the neighbourhoods, which also vary according to their functions. Neighbourhoods can be divided into residential, productive, commercial, cultural, administrative, touristic and scientific; and the neighborhood can have multiple functions<sup>(5)</sup>. This is what gives the original city its importance and makes it deserve to be rehabilitated for the current problems facing it.

Traditional industry was the backbone of the economy of the original cities until the beginning of this century, especially before the entry of the colonizer, who helped change the wheels of national and local production and led to the cracking of the quality of production and the relations between the source of raw materials and the needs of the population. These factors led to the change of the local production pattern towards modernization and the entry of capitalist methods, which negatively affected the production and profitability of the traditional industry, whose crafts were the most important means of livelihood for its inhabitants.

## **5. Ancient Islamic Cities**

With the expansion of Islam, the number of Islamic cities increased to about 25 by the end of the Umayyad era, such as Basra, Al-Kufa, Wasit, Iraq, Al-Fattat, Egypt and Al-Qairouan in North Africa. The Abbasids followed that approach by establishing many cities, including new and rehabilitated cities, including the Hashemite cities of Baghdad, Samaraa in Iraq, Sousse, Oran and Fes in the Morocco.

The old towns that have been rehabilitated and have received an increase in their lives, many of them include Damascus, Aleppo, Sana'a, Sa'ada, Zubaid, Yemen and Rashid, Egypt.

Muslim cities increase in value as they retain ancestral lifestyles from ancient occupations, long-standing living traditions, clothing, food, hoardings and markets.

If the Islamic historical cities differed in their conditions of origin, they also disagreed with the objective for which they were established, including what began as war camps, and then evolved into a residential city such as Basra, Kufa, Fattat, and Kerouane, and what was taken for administrative purposes as a centre, including as capitals and cities of successive countries such as Baghdad, Cairo, Fess, and other cities.

Among them were early fortified defense centers over time, predominantly civilian, transformed into cities such as Rabat, Monastery, Mériet...etc. But despite these functional differences, regions, ages and upbringing, the Islamic city was characterized by one general feature.

## **6. The Walled Islamic Cities**

Starting from the importance of security in human life, it was necessary for this element to be available in the Islamic city. Therefore, the wall was considered one of the civilizational standards which distinguish it from other cities. In other words, the wall was considered one of the main pillars of building the Islamic city, and it is one of the basic security factors or the protective shield of the city, as well as its strategic use in battlefields<sup>(6)</sup>.

However, the wall is not an invention of the Islamic civilization <sup>(7)</sup>, as there are many cities that the Arabs already found existing, such as the city of Damascus, which was surrounded by a wall, a large part of which still preserves its shape until now and is built with huge stones with great heights interspersed with towers and a group of doors. As from the outside, the city was surrounded by a deep trench which they used to fill with water in times of dangers. The city of Sanaa with its current is another example of already existing walled cities that Muslims found before the spread of Islam.

The general political and military events to which the map of the Islamic world was exposed in its successive eras had a direct impact on the interest in building various fortifications. <sup>(8)</sup>

Thanks to what is cited above we may conclude that the Islamic cities were affected by the ancient civilizations and imitated their ways of construction by building walls around the city to protect them from the invasions of other small Islamic nations <sup>(9)</sup>. We may mention here the walls of the city of Rabat, which were built in the 12th century AD <sup>(10)</sup>

## **7. Characteristics and Specificities of the Arab Islamic City**

Some researchers in the Arab-Islamic city notice in this type of city a civilized character which makes it unique. The Marçais brothers <sup>(11)</sup> see it as a system and a social and political development for the Arab city. However, Eugen Wirth believes that there is no Islamic city, but perhaps an eastern city because the urban patterns that exist do not meet the criteria and frameworks of the Arab-Islamic city.

Another element that can be pointed out is that the Islamic city arose out of plans that depended mainly on the older Greek and Roman cities <sup>(12)</sup>.

It is worth noting that the Arab-Islamic city is distinguished by the Great Mosque which is often situated at its center. The Islamic city is unique in its architectural elements and components that distinguish it from the rest of the civil facilities found in the rest of human civilizations, the most important of which are: the markets that represent the back-bone of life in it, in addition to the narrow streets and public baths.

The Arab-Islamic city is often divided into two main sections: the section for economic activities (Carpenters' street, Tanners' street...) and a section for residence and housing.

The Arab-Islamic city is built on foundations and standards where the principle of custom is put ahead, including the principle of neighbourhood, which aims at preserving the honour and sanctity of the Muslim to the extent that even the minarets of mosques were taking into account such matters and did not overlook the intimate lives of the neighbouring houses.

### **7.1 Ethnicity and its Impact on Shaping the Islamic City**

People living in rural areas have a great attachment and show a lot of loyalty to their families and ethnic belongings, and the reflection of this tribal spirit has appeared in the neighbourhoods of the cities, where each tribe resided in its own residential space of the Islamic city. So, we notice a decrease in the relations among the city dwellers who only get in touch during organized times in specific areas such as the during the Friday prayer in Mosques.

#### **7.1.1 Location of the Mosque**

While at its first construction stages, Muslims used to build their city by building the mosque in the center of the city after settling in the open areas. The mosque can also be located near the market and close to the house of the Caliph or the governor, as well as public service buildings.

### 7.1.2 The Market

Being the centre of trade and economic activity in the Islamic city, the market is where wholesalers or retailers, craftsmen and customers meet, and it used to be called in the ancient Islamic cities of North Africa by ‘ALTARBIA’ in which craftsmen, tailors and the like hold their commercial activities.

### 7.1.3 The Residential Areas

The residential areas in Islamic cities surround the market and are directly linked to it by main streets which are interconnected by narrow alleys.

### 7.1.4 The Alleys and Paths

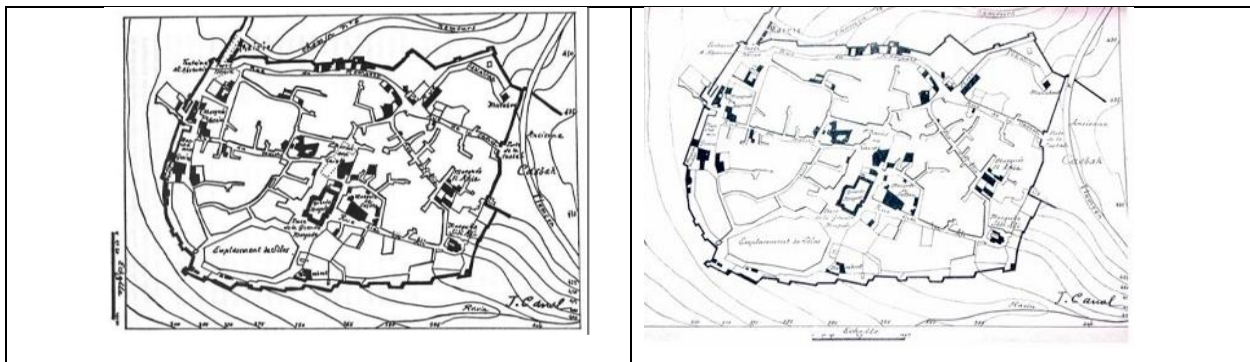
The alleys and paths in ancient Islamic cities are often narrow because of several reasons, among which is the irregular growth of these cities, or according to the tribal ties between the residents of each neighbourhood, and they may have been made narrow to be protected from sunlight and various air currents. Sometimes we find that these alleys and paths are closed at the end and do not have a single outlet, and this may render it easier to captivate the invaders in case the city was assaulted.

### 7.1.5 The External Planning

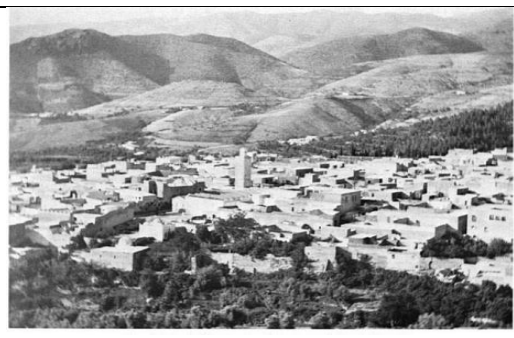
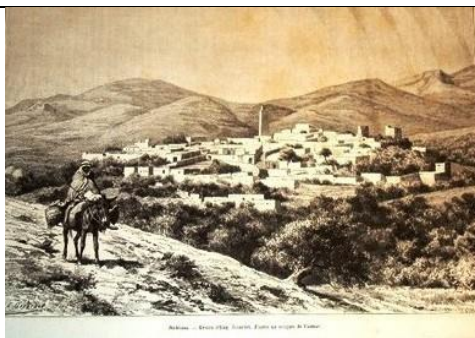
The unorganized external planning dominates over the Islamic city and may in some cases lead to the circular layout of the city such is the case with Kufa, Basra and Baghdad in Iraq.

## 8- Nedroma the Islamic City

This part of the study will shed light on the city of Nedroma focusing on its history, as its construction is concerned, its geographical situation and the characteristics that make of it a unique Islamic city.



Old Plans of the City of Nedroma <https://elmouahidia.dz/std.php?lg=ar&id=4#>



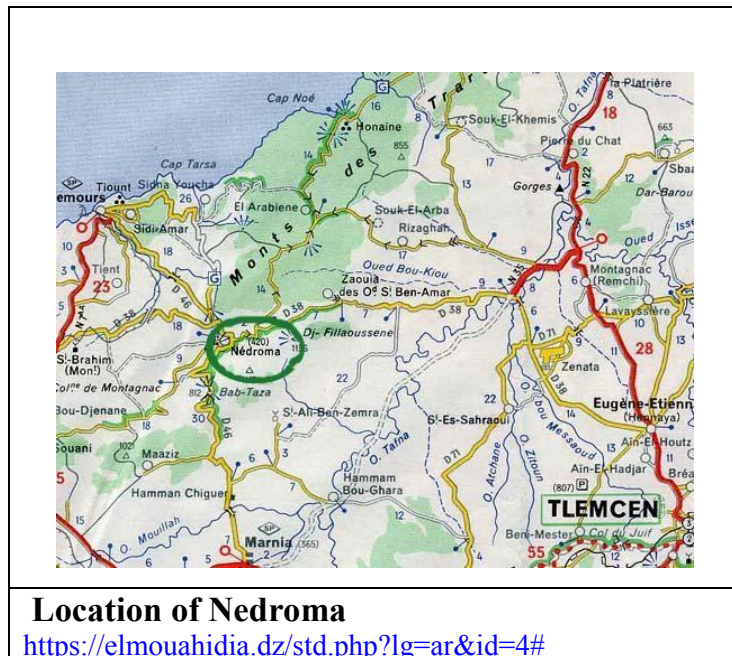
Old photos of the City of Nedroma <https://elmouahidia.dz/std.php?lg=ar&id=4#>

## 8.1 Geographical Situation

Nedroma is located in the far west of Algeria, and it belongs to the governorate of Tlemcen. It is characterised by a rich urban heritage that bears witness to a prosperous historical era, especially that of Almoravids period. The city was founded at the foot of Mount Felaoucen<sup>(13)</sup>, opposite the city from the northern side of the Mediterranean Sea, 6 km away from it, on a straight line, located between two valleys, Wadi Al-Hamra from the east, and Demin river from the west<sup>(14)</sup>. The city rises above sea level at about 360 m in certain areas and 470 m in others<sup>(15)</sup>.

The city is located astronomically between latitudes 19° and 20° and longitudes 4° and 5°. It is among the cities of western Algeria, 18 km away from the city of EL Ghazaouet, and about 60 km from its governorate Tlemcen, and the distance between it and Oran in the east is 160 km, and the distance between it and The Moroccan border is about 45 km.

Nedroma was famous for its important strategic location, as it was in the middle of a group of small ports<sup>(16)</sup>, and not far from it, as it is a city overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.



## 8. 2 History of the City of Nedroma

Many historians have been interested in the early history of reconstruction in the region of Nedroma, and perhaps the first writings came during the fifth 'Hidjri' century in the source labeled "Description of Africa" by its owner Al-Hasan bin Muhammad Al-Wazzan, in addition to what the two historians Al-Bakri who mentioned in his book "Morocco in the Remembrance of Africa and Morocco". It is an important part of the historical source "The Paths and Kingdoms". Then Al-Idrici is included in excerpts from the book "Nuzhat Al-Mushtaq". In this regard, we also refer to the writings of Algerian historians and some specialists in archeology from Europe, where their books and researches were devoted to the history of urbanization in the region of Nedroma and its suburbs.

Despite all the aforementioned sources, the date of the beginning of the reconstruction of the city of Nedroma remains unknown. Historians' views continued to be contradicted by those who traced them back to the Roman period. Its name is explained by the Roman presence in the area, and another regiment refers to the name of the Barbarian tribe, which, as Hassan EL Wazan referred to, inhabited the region's mountains<sup>(17)</sup>. 'Ndroumeh' stated this explicit name in a few

locations of the main sources of history. In this regard, is a quote: "... a walled city of Nedroumeh, with a river and orchards in it of all fruits..."<sup>(18)</sup>

### 8.3 Nedroma the Islamic City and its Characteristics

- a -The market:** The site of Nedroma links a group of surrounding countryside and valleys, which formed an economic and commercial meeting point for successive historical eras.
- b- The Sultan's Palace:** Located on the southern side of the old city, it dates back to 1160 AD.
- c-Residential Neighbourhoods:** Houses and homes, such as the residence of the Judge (Dar al-Qadi) which is the nucleus of residential communities.
- d- Public Facilities:** These are amenities meant for public use to provide services to the city dwellers. The most important ones were for example the old public baths, the Almoravid Mosque, in addition to hotels...etc.
- e- The Walls of the Kasbah:** The city walls consisted of two floors, in order to reinforce the solidity of the building <sup>(19)</sup>.
- f- Craft neighborhoods:** These are the areas where industrial activities are practiced.
- g- The Gates:** The Kasbah gate is the only gate among the four others which still remains standing. Its construction goes back to the Almohad era.
- h- The Grand Mosque:** This is one of Algeria's oldest mosques, built by Yusuf Ibn Tashvin, Prince of El Murabitin State, around 474 AH/M 1081. The date of the founding of some historical monuments in the city of Nedroma remains unknown, among which is the date of the foundation of El Murabitin Mosque, which made the mission of studying it a complicated task. Although the mosque has some materialistic indications, such as the founding plaque that was part of the mosque's pulpit, which was found by René BASSI, who was on an official mission to Nedroma for the purpose of studying the region historically and archaeologically.





Vestiges de la KASBAH, Datant de l'époque de  
Abdelmoumène Ben Ali El-Koumi

آثار القسبة بمدينة ندرومة القديمة  
عبد السلطان عبد المؤمن بن علي الكومي الندرومي

**Nedroma's Monuments** <https://elmouahidia.dz/std.php?lg=ar&id=4#>

## 9. Preserving Islamic Cities

If saving the ancient Islamic cities is a historical responsibility and a civilized duty, then achieving it is a difficult task because of its high costs and complex techniques.

The ways to save the ancient cities differed, and the perceptions of researchers and those interested in the field are diversified and were divided into distinct approaches as shown below.

**a-** Some of them call for the physical saving of these cities.

**b-** Others call for the form revival of these cities while taking into consideration their human functions , and this is what is termed by all specialists in the maintenance of archaeological buildings and historical monuments by integrating buildings into daily life after they were abandoned or irrationally exploited, taking into account, of course, the traditional and the contemporary requirements.

**c-** A third group entered into this equation, calling for the revival of the civilized thought within which these cities originated and flourished from their early beginnings until they became a metropolis of architecture.

Antique cities today face urban and civilization challenges that are currently reflected in the aesthetic appearance and artistic value. The rescue operation must take into account all aspects related to the form, function and historical value that reflect the functional role it played throughout history, so that it remains a mirror of meanings, values and human heritage.

Cities and monuments are like immortal historical books. They can also be considered as the main sources of historical facts that are of great importance in the history of nations, in addition to the architectural arts which, according to some researchers, bear the characteristics of the ancient or contemporary heritage<sup>(22)</sup>. What increases this creative aspect and makes it special and unique in the history of a nation is that researchers interested in Islamic architecture throughout history do not deal with silent landmarks, but rather a record that includes many chapters of civilized and social history, as well as other chapters from the history of Muslim countries<sup>(23)</sup>.

### 9.1 Constraints Facing the Saving of Islamic Cities

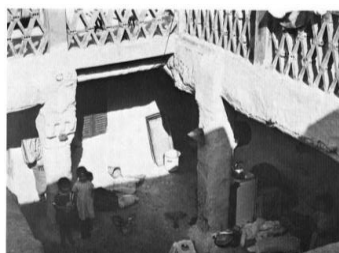


The most recurrent difficulties facing and obstructing the way to protect the built heritage in Islamic cities can be summarized in the following elements:

- a-** Financial support and the material resources necessary for the preparation and implementation of maintenance programs.
- b-** Lack of public and private legislation to protect ancient cities.
- c-** Rapid economic and social growth, especially in the field of construction, and the change in lifestyle and production from the dependent family system to the capitalist one.
- d-** The high intensity of urbanization in the old cities, in addition to the absence of control and management bodies.
- e-** The scarcity of the necessary scientific expertise, as the current works are in their wholeness random, carried out by some individuals.
- f-** Lack of national awareness within civil societies, in addition to the lack of incentives in the field of preserving the built heritage with in Islamic cities.

### **9.2 Islamic Cities: Maintenance and Protection Stages**

- a-** The stage of documentation and detailed survey of the historical city based on ancient archaeological maps, historical sources, aerial photographs and survey studies.
- b-** Inventory of architectural elements, and diagnosis of their most important damages.
- c-** Studying the priorities of the most important effects in the proposed restoration and protection plan to save Islamic cities.
- d-** The study and analysis of the natural and human damage factors.
- e-** The Study of the building materials and the techniques used in the construction of the Islamic city.
- f-** The Examination of all aspects of modernization in the city to make it compatible with what is ancient.
- g-** Finding solutions and ways to revive the old Islamic cities through their integration.



**Effects of Monuments' Neglect in the City of Nedroma**

## **10. Conclusion**

Taking into consideration what has been mentioned throughout this paper, preserving the material heritage of the nation is a collective responsibility of all those who belong to this societal structure, with their different intellectual orientations, scientific levels, and varying ages and ranks because the issue is related to proving existence through valuing the past and ensuring its continuity into the future in what is known by social sustainability. Therefore, the beginning will be by using the various inventory and census operations of this material heritage and the transition to the completion of a national archaeological map. The aforementioned inventory and census operations are considered as an identity card for archaeological properties within the Islamic city, to provide legal protection for them and to place them in the legal protection schemes for cultural and local bodies, such as land occupancy schemes, development schemes and national orientation plans. As for the third stage, the stakeholders should find consensual solutions with harmonious dimensions in the service of the public interest, and to set a road map for integrating the archaeological heritage into the country's economic programs.

The next step should be moving to the processes of preservation, maintenance and functional restoration by adopting the approach of the form adapted to the function, then functional integration according to the urgent need and field necessity and the development of appropriate tourist paths. Here we point to a move away from philosophical restoration and without reference to intellectual theories and other field schools and complying with their principles without taking into account local specificity, passing through awareness and sensitization of civil society about its role in the process, with the continuous review and update of laws related to heritage protection.

As an example, the city of Nedroma, with its old fabric, can be considered an exemplary field for this by activating the city's preserved sector program, and accelerating as much as possible in limiting unorganized and deliberate urban expansion, by involving activists in the field, such as the Almohad Association, to mention but not limited to it, due to its experience and its seniority in the field of protecting both material and immaterial heritage of the region.

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